

### Mass predation of hibernating *Aglais urticae* (L.) (Lep.: Nymphalidae) by Wren

Small Tortoiseshells *Aglais urticae* hibernate every year in the old railway goods truck which serves us as a woodshed. Normally, most overwinter successfully, except for the odd one or two eaten by spiders. In November 1997, a count revealed 35 of the butterflies in the shed.

After an exceptionally mild winter, blizzard conditions arrived on the night of 7/8 March 1998. By morning, there were deep drifts, and we were snowbound. Although it was bright, sunny and windless, a real fire was needed to supplement the central heating. Unfortunately this meant the door of the woodshed was left open all day.

Wrens *Troglodytes troglodytes* are common enough here, but do not often visit the garden. Even so, little attention was paid at first to the one that did so that day, until brightly-coloured piles of Small Tortoiseshell wings were noticed on the floor of the woodshed and the ground outside. The door of the shed was immediately closed, but over the next two or three days, the Wren ate every one of the hibernating tortoiseshells. Having found such a good source of conveniently torpid food, it now gained access through a small open hatch, managing to locate its prey in the dim interior but bringing this into the daylight for dismemberment.

As their scientific name implies, Wrens are well-known for entering caves and other dark places. In their excellent paper on hibernating moths, R.K.A. Morris and G.A. Collins (*Ent. Rec.* **103**: 313-321) report the unexplained loss during severe weather of 90% of the Herald *Scoliopteryx libatrix* moths hibernating in the upper chambers of a disused fort. I suggest that a Wren might well have been the culprit.

The numbers of Small Tortoiseshells seen the garden at Ordiquhill once spring eventually arrived were not noticeably affected by this localised carnage, such is the mobility of the species. Wrens themselves are short-lived, so the odds are that this particular individual will not be around next winter to remember where it found a good source of food.—ROY LEVERTON, Whitewells, Ordiquhill, Cornhill, Banffshire AB45 2HS.

### Hazards of moth collecting

Over the years, Torben Larsen has given accounts of the hazards of butterfly collecting in various parts of the world, and these have made delightful reading. Unlike butterfly collectors, those of us who are more interested in moths must necessarily pursue our activities at dusk or at night, and it is understandable that those who do not share our interest should be a little suspicious of our activities and have a feeling deep down that we are up to no good. Once, when out sugaring, I was accosted by a suspicious allotment-holder, who thought I might have designs on his rabbits. On another occasion, I had just started up my portable light trap when the local gendarmerie turned up, curious to see what I was doing. When told, they wished me good hunting and went their way.

The moth collector may well find himself in a rather embarrassing situation, such as that experienced by by Skat Hoffmeyer, the Bishop of Aarhus (Denmark). This